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From Imperial Metaphor to Rebellious Deities:
The History and Modern State of Western Studies of Chinese Popular Religion

by Rostislav Berezkin

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Introduction

The central purpose of this paper is to discuss the current achievements of Western scholars in the field of "Chinese popular religion" and to briefly present major discussions, trends, and subjects in this field. I analyze particular features of the Western scholarship on Chinese popular religion that often make it different from the relevant Chinese scholarship.

The basic structure and ideas of this essay originated in lectures that I gave at several universities in Taiwan and PRC over the period 2012–2013. In the process of preparation for them I discovered that there is no updated contemporary discussion of this subject either in English or Chinese.

There are already several overviews of the state of this field in English and Chinese;[1]

[1] For example, Stephen F. Teiser, "Popular Religion," *The Journal of Asian Studies* 54, no. 2 (May 1995): 378–395; Paul R. Katz (Kang Bao 康豹), "Xifang xuejie yanjiu Zhongguo shequ zongjiao chuantong de zhuyao dongtai" (Major tendencies in Western studies of the Chinese communal religious traditions) 西方學界研究中國社區宗教傳統的主要動態, Li Qionghua 李瓊花, transl.; Chen Jinguo 陳進國, ed., *Wen shi zhe* 文史哲 2009, 1 (cumulative 310): 58–74; David Faure (Ke Dawei 科大衛) and Liu Zhiwei 劉志偉, "'Biaozhunhua' haishi 'zhengtonghua': cong minjian xinyang yu liyi kan Zhongguo wenhua de dayitong" '標準化'還是'正統化'？——從民間信仰與禮儀看中國文化的大一統 (Standardization or orthopraxy: looking at the unification of Chinese culture from the perspective of folk beliefs and rituals), *Lishi renleixue xuekan* 歷史人類學學刊 6, no. 1 (2008.10): 1–21; Zhang Xun 張珣, "Bianyi, bianqian yu renting: jinnian Taiwan minjian zongjiao yingwen yanjiu qushi" 變異、變遷與認同: 近年台灣民間宗教英文研究趨勢 (Changes, transformation, and acceptance: tendencies of the English-language scholarship on Taiwanese folk religion) in *Taiwan bentu zongjiao yanjiu: jiegou yu bianyi* 台灣本土宗教研究：結構與變異 (Research on the indigenous religion of Taiwan: structure and changes; Taibei: Nantian, 2006): 62–84;

most of the works in this category, however, have quite specific purposes. For example, they criticize the existing terminology of "popular religion" and advocate for a replacement. These studies also tend to emphasize certain areas prevalent in the field and to reflect the author's position in the current argument over major questions in the study of popular beliefs. As a result, there is a need for a more objective and general overview to provide perspective for students of Chinese religion and other readers interested in this field. This overview is very important if one takes into consideration that this field of studies is now growing in Chinese and Japanese scholarship. Scholars in East Asia often refer to the Western studies in this field, and a number of Western works have been translated into Chinese and published recently in China.

This paper is designed to contribute to the creation of such an overview. However, it is not intended at all to be comprehensive. It is not the result of a special research project, since resources have been lacking to undertake such research. The paper is based mostly on information that I have collected during my work on several research projects, all related to the beliefs of commoners in China in the late imperial period.

In order to define the scope of my overview, I would like to note that "Western" in the essay's title refers to works written and published in English, without consideration of the background and citizenship of their authors.[2] I tried to present only areas in which Western scholars made the largest contribution, and approaches and views that have influenced the relevant East Asian scholarship (in Chinese and Japanese). I also need to note that I am discussing works that deal mostly with the so-called late imperial period in the history of China, — which usually includes the Yuan (1260–1368), Ming (1368–1644), and Qing (1644–1911)

Zhang Xun 張珣, "Bai hua qi fang huo he qu he cong? Shilun zongjiao shi wenhua liuoji de jiening yu nongsuo" 百花齊放或何去何從？試論宗教是文化邏輯的結晶與濃縮 (Let all flowers bloom at once or what way to take? Preliminary discussion of religion as crystallization or condensation of cultural logic), paper presented at the conference *Taiwan Hanren minjian zongjiao yanjiu lilun yu fangfa guoji yantaohui* 台灣漢人民間宗教研究理論與方法國際研討會 (Theory and methodology of the study of folk religion of the Han people of Taiwan), November 2009; Philip Clart, "Chinese Popular Religion" in *The Wiley-Blackwell Companion to Chinese Religions*, ed. Randall L. Nadeau (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2012): 220–235.

[2] The reader will find that many important studies mentioned in this paper were written in English by scholars of Chinese origin and/or citizenship.

dynasties — plus the early Republican period (1911–1949).[3] I treat only works that deal with the religion of the Han people of mainland China and Taiwan, not including research on the religions of the minority groups in China and overseas Chinese (especially Chinese communities of Southeast Asia).[4] In order to demonstrate the importance of Western works in the context of East Asian scholarship, I provide information about Chinese translations where relevant.

The essay opens with a brief overview of the characteristic features and history of Western scholarship on Chinese popular religion (section 1), then discusses a special area of studies for which Western scholarship is famous (section 2), describes the major theoretical discussions in Western studies (sections 3 and 4), and closes with an overview of subjects and approaches specific to Western scholarship (section 5).

1. The problem of terminology and the history of study of Chinese popular religion in the West

First, I would like to note that the term "popular religion" that appears in the title of this paper was coined and introduced by Western scholars. It is quite problematic and imprecise. The term came to appear in Chinese studies as a result of the application of Western theory to the study of the beliefs of commoners in China. Several scholars have divided Chinese religion into "big" and "small" traditions, corresponding respectively to the beliefs of ruling and lower classes. The understanding of the meaning of "popular" in this term is also problematic. Catherine Bell has classified three different approaches to "Chinese popular religion" in Western scholarship, which she interprets as the chronological succession of three models or stages.[5] At the first stage there

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[3] As we shall see, it is hard to differentiate between late imperial and modern periods in these works, as they often use materials dating back to both periods. However, I do not here address studies focusing on the contemporary period; for a discussion of the relationship of religion and modernity in China, see Katz, "Xifang xuejie yanjiu," pp. 70–73.

[4] One should note that these directions in research also have long existed in Western scholarship and are now rapidly developing.

[5] Catherine Bell, "Religion and Chinese Culture: Toward an Assessment of 'Popular Religion,'" *History of Religions* 29, no.1 (1989): 35–57.

was a stress on the marked difference between elite and popular religion. At the second stage "the holistic view" prevailed, which defined popular religion as a form of religion shared by the populace of China across social boundaries. At the third stage most scholars interpreted this form of religion as less an entity than an activity or an arena of conflict. Recently, Bell's view of these three stages was challenged by Philip Clart, who demonstrated that the three approaches cannot be interpreted as a chronological succession. The holistic views actually appeared during the early period of studies, while the "elite–folk dichotomy" perspective became prevalent in the works of Western scholars who studied the religion of rural areas in the 1960s and 1970s.[6] In addition, the three approaches outlined by Bell are not mutually exclusive. The third definition provides a type of resolution for the conflict of the two previous views, as it allows the discussion of conflict/interplay of unity and difference in consideration of all of Chinese culture. There are a number of influential works that adopt the analysis of unity and diversity in Chinese beliefs as a theoretical basis.[7]

As the term "popular religion" has often and successfully been criticized in recent scholarship, several leading scholars of Chinese religion avoid it; they have suggested other terms instead. For example, Paul R. Katz has used the term "communal religious traditions"[8] and Daniel L. Overmyer has used the term "local religion" in his recent book on the modern state of religion in North China.[9] However, in this essay I use the traditional term "popular religion" in

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[6] Philip Clart, "The Concept of 'Popular Religion' in the Study of Chinese Religions: Retrospect and Prospects," in *The Fourth Fu Jen University Sinological Symposium: Research on Religions in China: Status quo and Perspectives, Symposium Papers*, ed. Zbigniew Wesolowski (Xinzhuang: Furen Daxue chubanshe, 2007): 166–203.

[7] Robert P. Weller, *Unities and Diversities in Chinese Religion* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1987); Steven P. Sangren, *History and Magical Power in a Chinese Community* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1987); Stephen F. Teiser, *The Ghost Festival in Medieval China* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988; Chin. transl.: Tai Shiwen 太史文, *Youling de jieri: Zhongguo zhongshiji de xinyang yu shenghuo* 幽灵的节日：中国中世纪的信仰与生活, Hou Xudong 侯旭东，transl. (Hangzhou: Zhejiang renmin chuban she, 1999).

[8] Katz, "Xifang xuejie yanjiu," p. 58.

[9] Daniel L. Overmyer, *Local Religion in North China in the Twentieth Century: The Structure and Organization of Community Rituals and Beliefs* (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2009).

the sense of the common beliefs and practices of lay people of Han nationality. In my view, it helps to represent the religion of Chinese while avoiding the traditional division between the main institutionalized spiritual systems — Confucianism, Daoism, Buddhism, and the so-called "sectarian movements." In this usage this term has the meaning of "Chinese religion," in which the elements of the main traditions mentioned above co-exist in constant interplay. The alternative terms mentioned above appear to me either clumsy or imprecise.

Second, one needs to note that research on Chinese popular religion is limited by the nature of sources available to modern scholars. For the Tang dynasty (618–907) and earlier, the evidence on popular religion comes mainly from the sources composed by literati who were usually biased against popular practices. Only archaeological discoveries of art objects and manuscripts have given solid insights into the real state of affairs.[10] There are more sources dating back to the Song (960–1279) and Yuan dynasties, but only for the Ming and Qing periods do scholars have a large number of materials on popular religion, including epigraphy, local and private histories, miscellanea (*biji* 筆記), vernacular prose and drama, hagiographies and liturgical manuals, genealogies, and archival records. That is why most studies of popular religion focus on the Ming, Qing, and later periods.

Third, I would like to emphasize the fact that Western scholars were the first to study systematically the popular religious systems of China. Since a very early period, they contributed not only to the theoretical approaches toward popular religion, but also were engaged in the ethnographic fieldwork. To make our understanding of the historical process of these studies clearer, one can divide it into four periods. The first one spanned from the nineteenth century to the 1920s and can be defined as the "missionary period." One can roughly date the second period to the 1930s-1950s and call it the "historical period." The third period (1960s-1980s) is the "anthropological period." The fourth, modern or "comprehensive" period, started in the 1990s and continues till now.

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[10] A quite successful study of religious activities in everyday life in ancient China focused on personal welfare is Mu-chou Poo, *In Search of Personal Welfare: A View of Ancient Chinese Religion* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998); Chin. version: Pu Muzhou 蒲慕州, *Zhuixun yiji zhi fu: Zhongguo gudai de xinyang shijie* 追尋一己之福 : 中國古代的信仰世界 (Taibei: Yunchen wenhua, 1995).

Western missionaries were among the first people to research and describe the religious life of the Chinese; in addition, they treated these beliefs and practices as an integral part of the social and cultural sphere in China, and that was an innovative approach. The works by missionaries still have a historical value: some of them were recently translated into Chinese and published in China.[11] The works by Jan Jakob Maria de Groot (1854–1921) dating back to this period were particularly important for the further development of the study of popular religion. Modern scholars have noted de Groot's influence in terms of the combination of the study of written sources and fieldwork, the choice of informants and the style of analysis.[12] One should note that his comprehensive descriptions of religious practices of the Amoy (Xiamen) area have great historical value.

The second period encompasses the work of such historians of Chinese religion as Henri Maspero (1883–1945), Marcel Granet (1884–1940), and Wolfram Eberhard (1909–1989).[13] In their works took place the discussions of the nature of "popular religion" in China that had great

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[11] For representative works, see Henri S. J. Dore, *Researches into Chinese Superstitions*, M. Kennelly, et al., transl., 13 vol. (Shanghai: T'usewei Press, 1914–1938; reprint: Taibei: Ch'eng-wen, 1966–1967); Chin. transl.: Lu Shiqiu 禄是遒, *Zhongguo minjian chongbai. Zhongguo zhong shen* 中国民间崇拜, 中国众神, Wang Ding'an 王定安, transl. (Shanghai: Shanghai kexue jishu wenxian chubanshe, 2009), 10 vols.; Justus Doolittle, *Social Life of the Chinese: With Some Account of Their Religious, Governmental, Educational, and Business Customs and Opinions* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1865; rpt. Taipei: Cheng-wen, 1966); Chin. transl.: Lu Gongming 卢公明, *Zhongguo ren de shehui shenghuo: yige Meiguo chuanjiaoshi de wan Qing Fuzhou jian wen lu* 中国人的社会生活 : 一个美国传教士的晚清福州见闻录, Chen Zeping 陈泽平, transl. (Fuzhou: Fujian renmin chubanshe, 2009); Jan Jakob Maria de Groot, *The Religious System of China: Its Ancient Forms, Evolution, History and Present Aspect, Manners, Custom and Social Institutions Connected Therewith*, 6 vols. (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 1892–1910).

[12] Teiser, "Popular Religion," p. 379.

[13] Henri Maspero, "The Mythology of Modern China" (1928) in his *Taoism and Chinese Religion*, Frank A. Kierman, Jr., transl. (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1981); Marcel Granet, La religion des Chinois (Paris: Éditions Imago, 1980); Engl. transl.: *The Religion of the Chinese People*, Maurice Freedman, transl. (New York: Harper & Row, 1975); Chin. transl.: Ge Lanyan 葛兰言, *Zhongguoren de zongjiao xinyang* 中国人的宗教信仰, Cheng Men 程门, transl. (Guiyang: Guizhou renmin chubanshe, 2010); Wolfram Eberhard, "Studies in Chinese Religion: 1920–1932" in *Wolfram Eberhard, Moral and Social Values of the Chinese: Collected Essays*, Alide Eberhardt, transl. (Taipei: Chinese Materials and Research Aids Center, 1971).

theoretical significance. The fieldwork studies continued in this period,[14] but scholars in the West also extensively used historical material.

The results of the analysis of both types of materials combined with the use of Western concepts were summarized in the book on Chinese religion and society by C. K. Yang that became a very influential work in this field.[15] Yang used Western sociological concepts for his discussion of the religious beliefs and practices of the Chinese and demonstrated that they had an important role in the history of society and state in China. That was a significant contribution to the understanding of Chinese religion, as previous studies, especially the works of Westernized Chinese intellectuals, had underestimated its role in society.[16] His other theoretical contribution was the division between the “institutional” and “diffused” forms of religion in China. In Yang’s view institutional religion is characterized by a consciously systematized theology, scriptures, organized forms of worship, and professional religious personnel; in diffused religion, “its theology, cultus, and personnel [are] so intimately diffused into one or more secular social institutions that they become a part of the concept, rituals, and structure of the latter, thus having no significant independent existence.”[17] The institutional religions thus appear similar to the religions of Western world, while the diffused religion in China seems to be entirely unique. According to this view, Confucianism (with some restrictions), Daoism, and Buddhism — the traditional “three teachings” — are institutional religions, while other beliefs and practices fall into the category of diffused popular religion.

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[14] See, for example, W. A. Grootaers, Li Shih-yü, Wang Fu-shih, *The Sanctuaries in a North-China City: A Complete Survey of the Cultic Buildings in the City of Hsüan-hua (Chahar), by the survey team of Fujen University, August 1948* (Bruxelles: Institut Belge des hautes etudes Chinoises, 1995).

[15] C. K.Yang, *Religion in Chinese Society: A Study of Contemporary Social Functions of Religion and Some of Their Historical Factors* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1961; rpt. Taipei: SMC publishing, 1994), Chin. transl.: Yang Qingkun 杨庆堃, *Zhongguo shehui zhong de zongjiao: zongjiao de xiandai shehui gongneng yu qi lishi yinsu zhi yanjiu* 中国社会中的宗教：宗教的现代社会功能与其历史因素之研究, Fan Lizhu 范丽珠 et al., transl. (Shanghai: Shanghai renmin chubanshe, 2007).

[16] Yang, *Religion in Chinese Society*, pp. 3–6.

[17] Ibid., pp. 294–295.

This approach is still influential in modern scholarship, though many scholars have revised and criticized this classification. First, most modern scholars would agree that there is a fourth form of highly organized religion in China, namely the so-called "syncretic religions," or sects that flourished especially during the Ming and Qing periods, and that they still have a big influence on the religious landscape in different regions of China. Western scholars initially made a great contribution to the study of these traditions (see section 2). Second, in the Western scholarship the study of syncretism of different "institutional" religious traditions was highly developed. Several special studies have demonstrated that in different time periods there was close interaction between several religious traditions, namely Buddhism and Daoism, so it was almost impossible to divide between them on the popular level.[18] There was interchange of ideas and practices in Buddhism and Daoism: for example, Buddhist deities of foreign origin were highly integrated into the Chinese religious system after their cults underwent considerable transformation in China.[19] The scholarship on Daoism has demonstrated that it is practically impossible to differentiate between folk beliefs and Daoist institutions, as they are so closely interrelated.[20] The new term of "communal religious traditions" has been designed to overcome

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[18] See, for example, Michel Strickmann, *Chinese Magical Medicine*, Bernard Faure, ed., (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002); Christine Mollier, *Buddhism and Taoism Face to Face: Scripture, Ritual, and Iconographic Exchange in Medieval China* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2009); Stephen F. Teiser, *The Ghost Festival* (especially chapter 1).

[19] Stephen F. Teiser, *The Scripture on the Ten Kings and the Making of Purgatory in Medieval Chinese Buddhism* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1994); Valerie Hansen, "Gods on Walls: A Case of Indian Influence on Chinese Lay Religion?" in *Religion and Society in T'ang and Sung China*, ed. Patricia B. Ebrey and Peter N. Gregory (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1993), 75–113; Zhiru, *The Making of a Savior Bodhisattva: Dizang in Medieval China* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2007).

[20] Kristopher Schipper, "Vernacular and Classical Ritual in Taoism," *Journal of Asian Studies* 45, no.1 (1985): 21–57; Kenneth Dean, *Taoist Ritual and Popular Cults in Southeast China* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993); Vincent Goossaert, "Qingdai Jiangnan diqu de Chenghuang miao, Zhang tianshi ji Daojiao guanliao tixi" 清代江南地區的城隍廟，張天師及道教官僚體系 (Temples of city gods, Zhang celestial masters and the Daoist bureaucratic system in the Jiangnan region during the Qing dynasty), *Qingshi yanjiu* 清史研究 (Research on Qing history) 1 (2010): 1–11.

the outdated classification into the institutional and diffused forms of religion.[21] Third, several scholars have insisted that the local traditions of worship not directly connected with Buddhism and Daoism are also organized into a coherent system. For example, in his recent book on local religious traditions in North China, Overmyer has argued against Yang's bifurcation and states "that local traditions of ritual and belief are important both in their own right and as a foundation of traditional Chinese ideas, values and social relationships. These traditions are persistent and deeply institutionalized in their own ways …"[22]

In the 1960s-1980s local religious traditions of China became the subject of numerous works by Western anthropologists, who mainly conducted their fieldwork in Taiwan and Hong-Kong, the principle areas open to foreign scholars at that time.[23] The important characteristic of the "anthropological period" was the further application of Western theories of beliefs and ritual practice to the Chinese materials.

Important changes took place in the field of Chinese religion studies in the fourth period of their development. This period has the following distinctive features: (1) Western scholars redefined many theories and approaches after the detailed analysis of new materials that had recently become available; (2) many collaborative research projects involving Western and Chinese/Taiwanese scholars have taken place. With regard to the first point, many Western scholars recently have stressed even more the important role of religion in social life in China, as they rejected the traditional division into the separate categories of religion and society. Especially important are works that emphasize the role of religious traditions in the initial period of the formation of "civil society" and the "public sphere" in early modern China. Katz in his book about the deity of plague Marshal Wen, worshipped in South China (most of his materials

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[21] Katz, "Xifang xuejie yanjiu," p. 58.

[22] Daniel L. Overmyer, *Local Religion in North China*, p. 5.

[23] The representative works are Maurice Freedman, *Chinese Lineage and Society: Fukien and Kwangtung* (New York: Athlone Press, 1966); Emily M. Ahern, *The Cult of the Dead in a Chinese Village* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1973); Gary Seaman, *Temple Organization in a Chinese Village* (Taipei: Chinese Association for Folklore; Orient Cultural Service, 1978); Steven P. Sangren, *History and Magical Power*; David K. Jordan, *Gods, Ghosts, and Ancestors: Folk Religion in a Taiwanese Village* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1972).

come from Zhejiang province), has argued that the scholars who studied Chinese society and religion separately ignored or underestimated the role of religion in public life because they were basing their observations on Western concepts of the public sphere.[24] But in the Chinese public sphere religious activities such as temple societies, deity cults, monasteries, and secret societies played an important role. Temples and festivals were run by special organizations outside the imperial bureaucracy, and their religious activities were both supported by local communities and scrutinized by the state.[25] Katz has concluded that “cults to popular deities like Marshal Wen, whose followers included both religious specialists and lay believers, may well have been an integral part of China’s third realm in the sense of occupying a public sphere between state and society.”[26] This interpretation laid down the foundation for a new concept of religion and society in traditional China. Most modern works in Western languages analyze the social roles of religious institutions and practices.

The second feature is related to the growth of China’s own research on popular religion. Chinese scholars trained as anthropologists or historians of religion have turned to doing fieldwork in several areas of China.[27] Collaborative projects conducted by scholars from different countries have existed for a long time,[28] but recently they have grown into large and fruitful efforts. The results of these research projects have been published in English as well as in Chinese.[29] To a different but still significant extent, Western scholars haven taken part in the

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[24] Reduced to the “third realm” — a space between state and society in which both interact — in the theory concerning existence of the public sphere in China by Philip C. C. Huang.

[25] Paul R. Katz, *Demon Hordes and Burning Boats: The Cult of Marshal Wen in Late Imperial Chekiang* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995), pp. 180–189.

[26] Katz, *Demon Hordes*, p. 189.

[27] For a useful overview of the results of this work, see Daniel L. Overmyer, with the assistance of Shin-Yi Chao, ed., *Ethnography in China Today: A Critical Assessment of Methods and Results* (Taipei: Yuan-Liou, 2002).

[28] See, for example, David Johnson, ed., *Ritual Opera, Operatic Ritual: “Mu-lien Rescues His Mother,”* in *Chinese Popular Culture: Papers from the International Workshop on the Mu-lien Operas* (Berkeley: University of California, 1989).

[29] John Lagerwey, ed., *Religion and Chinese Society*, 2 vols. (Hong Kong: Chinese University Press; Paris: École

large research projects “Traditional Hakka Society Series” (Kejia chuantong shehui congshu客家傳統社會叢書), “Traditional Zhejiang Society Series” (Zhejiang chuantong shehui congshu浙江傳統社會叢書), “Series on the Local Religion of North China” (Huabei difang zongjiao congshu 華北地方宗教叢書), and others.[30] The cooperation of scholars from different countries leads to the exchange of ideas, methods, and views that will define the further development of studies of Chinese popular religion.

In the following sections I discuss the areas in the study of Chinese religion in which Western scholars have made the most significant contributions and demonstrated especially innovative approaches.

2. The study of sectarian traditions

One of the major contributions of Western scholars to the study of Chinese religious traditions was the comprehensive research into the sectarian teachings[31] that occupy an important place in the Chinese religious landscape in the late imperial period. The scholars of the “missionary period” started to pay attention to sects that were strictly persecuted by the imperial government: the work by de Groot again is noteworthy in this aspect.[32] The works by Overmyer were path-breaking in this aspect of Chinese studies: significantly, his major monographs on this topic have been all translated into Chinese. In his first work, Overmyer demonstrated the special nature of

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française d’Extrême-Orient, 2004); Marianne Bujard (Lü Min 吕敏) and Qin Jianming 秦建明, *Yaoshan shengmu miao yu shenshe* 堯山聖母廟與神社 (The temple of the Divine Mother at Yao Mount and its association; Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2003); Kenneth Dean and Zheng Zhenman, *Ritual Alliances of the Putian Plain*, 2 vols. (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2010).

[30] The book by Overmyer, *Local Religion in North China* (see above), was largely based on the materials of this project.

[31] Often called “secret religions” (*mimi zongjiao* 秘密宗教) in Chinese because they often acted secretly in the late traditional period.

[32] See his *Sectarianism and Religious Persecution in China: A Page in the History of Religions* (Amsterdam: J. Miller, 1903–04).

the ideology, mythology, and personnel of sectarian movements.[33] In their collaborative work, David Jordan and Overmyer have analyzed the transformation and survival of sectarian traditions in modern Taiwan.[34] Another work by Overmyer has dealt with the contents of the special liturgical literature of sects — "precious scrolls" (*baojuan* 寶卷), which appeared during the Southern Song (1127–1279) or Yuan period and flourished during the Ming period.[35] One of the major contributions of Overmyer and his followers was the interpretation of sects as genuinely religious organizations, while contemporary Chinese scholarship emphasized their role in organizing rebellions and regarded them as political organizations. Western scholars, starting with Overmyer, have put special emphasis on the search for the origins of sectarian ideology and mythology: the popular forms of Buddhism, especially Maitreyanism, and Manichaeism in the period prior to and during the Yuan dynasty, were defined as the most probable sources.[36]

Later a number of Western works appeared that discussed the history of one particular teaching[37] or contained a general overview of the history of several traditions.[38] One should

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[33] Daniel L. Overmyer, *Folk Buddhist Religion: Dissenting Sects in Late Traditional China* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1976); Chin. transl.: Ou Danian 欧大年, *Zhongguo minjian zongjiao jiaopai yanjiu*, Liu Xinyong 刘心勇 et al., transl. (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1993).

[34] David K. Jordan and Daniel L. Overmyer, *The Flying Phoenix: Aspects of Chinese Sectarianism in Taiwan* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986); Chin. transl.: Jiao Dawei 焦大衛 and Ou Danian, *Fei luan: Zhongguo minjian jiaopai mian mian guan* 飛鸞: 中國民間教派面面觀, Zhou Yumin 周育民, transl. (Hong Kong: Xiaggang zhongwen daxue, 2005).

[35] Daniel L. Overmyer, *Precious Volumes: An Introduction to Chinese Sectarian Scriptures from the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries* (Cambridge: Harvard University Asia Center, 1999); Chin. transl.: Ou Danian, *Baojuan: shiliu zhi shiqi shiji Zhongguo zongjiao jingjuan daolun* 宝卷：十六至十七世纪中国宗教经卷导论, Ma Rui 马睿, transl. (Beijing: Zhongyang bianyi chubanshe, 2012).

[36] Overmyer, *Folk Buddhist Religion*, pp. 73–85; Kwang-Ching Lin and Richard Hon-chun Shek, eds., *Heterodoxy in Late Imperial China* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2004), pp. 73–108.

[37] Li, Thomas Shiyu, and Susan Naquin, "The Baoming Temple: Religion and the Throne in Ming and Qing China," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 48, no.1 (June 1988): 131–188; Kenneth Dean, *Lord of the Three in One: The Spread of a Cult in Southeast China* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998); Thomas David DuBois, *The*

especially note works by Susan Naquin in which she explored the political aspect of the sectarian movements and demonstrated the role of heterodox religious ideas in the prominent social upheavals of the Qing dynasty.[39] Western scholars also paid considerable attention to the religious components of the Boxer rebellion (Yihetuan) in 1899.[40] These studies contributed to the new interpretation of these important events in the history of Chinese state.

Now there are different views of the history of Chinese sectarian movements in Western scholarship. For example, Barend J. ter Haar has reinterpreted the traditional history of sects that took the "Teaching of the White Lotus (Bailianjiao 白蓮教)" as a prototype of all rebellious religious movements of the late imperial period. In his book he has re-evaluated the available materials, demonstrated the transformation of the White Lotus society from its beginning as a lay Buddhist movement during Southern Song into the rebellious organization during Yuan, and he has come to the conclusion that the term "Teaching of the White Lotus," often used in the official

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Sacred Village: Social Change and Religious Life in Rural North China (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2005).

[38] See, for example, Hubert Seiwert, in collaboration with Ma Xisha, *Popular Religious Movements and Heterodox Sects in Chinese History* (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2003).

[39] Susan Naquin, *Millenarian Rebellion in China: The Eight Trigrams Uprising of 1813* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1976); Chin. transl.: Han Shurui 韩书瑞, *Qiannian moshi zhi luan: 1813 nian Baguajiao qiyi* 千年末世之乱：1813 年八卦教起义, Chen Zhongdan 陈仲丹, transl. (Nanjing: Jiangsu renmin chubanshe, 2010); Naquin, *Shantung Rebellion: The Wang Lun Uprising of 1774* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981); Chin. transl.: Han Shurui, *Shandong panluan: 1774 nian Wang Lun qiyi* 山东叛乱：1774 年王伦起义, Liu Ping 刘平, Tang Yanchao 唐雁超, transl., (Nanjing: Jiangsu renmin chubanshe, 2008); Naquin, "The Transmission of White Lotus Sectarianism in Late Imperial China" in *Popular Culture in Late Imperial China*, ed. David Johnson et al., 255- 291 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985). See also Blaine Gaustad, "Prophets and Pretenders: Inter-sect Competition in Qianlong China," *Late Imperial China* 21, no. 1 (June 2000): 1–40.

[40] Joseph W. Esherick, *The Origins of the Boxer Uprising* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987); Chin. transl.: Zhou Xirui 周锡瑞, *Yihetuan yundong de qiyuan* 义和团运动的起源, Zhang Junyi 张俊义, Wang Tong 王栋, transl. (Nanjing: Jiangsu renmin chubanshe, 1994); Paul A. Cohen, *History in Three Keys: The Boxers as Event, Experience, and Myth* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997); Chin. transl.: Kewen 柯文, *Lishi san diao: zuo wei shijian, jingli he shenghua de Yihetuan* 历史三调: 作为事件、经历和神话的义和团, Du Jidong 杜继东, transl. (Nanjing: Jiangsu renmin chubanshe, 2000).

sources about religious rebels, was actually no more than a label that started with the Ming dynasty; therefore, he has cautioned researchers against the danger of overusing official sources.[41] Another important work by ter Haar has analyzed the religious component of the Triads (Tiandihui 天地會in Chinese), in this way crossing the traditional boundary drawn between so-called “secret religions” and “secret societies” in the Western scholarship.[42] Earlier Western scholars, starting with Overmeyer, treated the first as primarily religious organizations and the latter primarily as organizations with political goals.[43] However, according to ter Haar, such secret societies as the Triads also included a religious aspect in their activities: these were deeply rooted in more mainstream mythology and religious practice.

Western scholars have continued their research of Chinese sectarian movements in this recent, fourth period.[44] An important achievement was the publication of two special volumes of *Minsu quyi* 民俗曲藝 (English title: *Journal of Chinese Ritual, Theatre and Folklore*) dedicated to the redemptive societies and salvationist religions during the last decades of the Chinese empire, Republican, and modern periods. The articles by scholars of various countries explore the development of the philanthropist side of new religions and thus offer an important perspective for the further interpretation of these sects in Chinese history.[45]

3. Theoretical discussions

A. Standardization in Chinese religion and culture

One of the current major discussions in the field of study of Chinese popular religion involves the problems of standardization and cultural unity in traditional China. These problems fall into

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[41] Barend J. ter Haar, *The White Lotus Teachings in Chinese Religious History* (Leiden: E.J.Brill. 1992).

[42] Barend J. ter Haar, *Ritual and Mythology of the Chinese Triads: Creating an Identity* (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 1998).

[43] Daniel L. Overmyer, *Folk Buddhist Religion*, pp. 54–56.

[44] ter Haar conducts a research project on the Teaching of Dragon Flower (Longhuajiao 龍華教), which developed and persisted in Fujian and Taiwan from the late imperial period till now.

[45] David A. Palmer, Paul R. Katz, and Chien-Chuan Wang, “Redemptive Societies in Cultural and Historical Contexts,” *Minsu quyi* 173 (Sept. 2011): 1–12.

the major area of interest of Western scholars — the social role of religion — and became major theoretical issues in the third period of the history of Western research into Chinese religion.

Western scholars since early days have paid attention to the high degree of cultural integration in China that persisted despite the existence of numerous differences, including those of religious practices. In the 1980s, an American scholar, James L. Watson, discussed the question of standardization in his works on Chinese popular religion that became very influential in this field. In his first article Watson analyzed the case of the promotion of a state-approved deity, the sea goddess Tianhou 天后 (also known as Mazu 媽祖), by state authorities and local elites as an example of the cultural integration of the country through the standardization of culture.[46] Later Watson developed his ideas in his preface to a volume dealing with funerary rites, *Death Ritual in Late Imperial and Modern China*. There, he used the term "orthopraxy" (correct practice) in application to Chinese religion. He argued that cultural authorities (officials and elites) focused on the standardization of ritual practice rather than trying to actually control the beliefs of the people. This view helps to explain the high degree of variation within an overarching structure of unity; in Watson's terms: "By enforcing orthopraxy (correct practice) rather than orthodoxy (correct belief) state officials made it possible to incorporate people from many different ethnic or ritual backgrounds with varying beliefs and attitudes into an overarching social system we now call China."[47]

Watson's work stimulated further discussion on standardization in the late imperial period; his theory now has both proponents and opponents among the leading scholars of Chinese religion. In many cases, Watson's theory of standardization and orthopraxy was very useful for explaining the social role of religion. In such cases the uniformity of interests and the actions of

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[46] James L. Watson, "Standardizing the Gods: The Promotion of T'ien Hou ('Empress of Heaven') along the South China Coast, 960–1960" in *Popular Culture in Late Imperial* China, 292–324.

[47] James L. Watson, "Introduction: The Structure of Chinese Funerary Rites" in *Death Ritual in Late Imperial and Modern China*, ed. James L. Watson and Evelyn S. Rawski (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), pp. 10–11. For a summary of Watson's ideas on this issue, see James L. Watson, "Rites or Beliefs? The Construction of a Unified Culture in Late Imperial China" in *China's Quest for National Identity* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993): 80–103.

the state representatives and local elites was evident. The state and elites could cooperate in promoting certain rites or the cult of a specific deity. State control in the sphere of popular cults had been very important since early times. For several reasons, intellectuals who served as state officials in charge of control over the rituals proclaimed certain religious practices to be "illicit." They regarded these cults as harmful to the morality or the material welfare of commoners. The term "licentious sacrifices" (*yinsi* 淫祀) has been used frequently in the discourse of state officials from at least the Han dynasty (206 B.C.E.—220 C.E.) up to the present time.[48] However, in the later period local elites often patronized certain cults that the state could deem illicit because they thought of these deities as especially powerful and responsive; sometimes they petitioned the government for official recognition of a certain deity worshipped locally. The state recognition of such a local deity usually had the form of granted titles (*fenghao* 封號), temple placards (*bian'e* 匾額), or stele inscriptions (*beiwen* 碑文). The movement to obtain court-granted titles was especially prominent in the Lower Yangtze region during the Southern Song period, and it became the subject of a special study by Valerie Hansen.[49] Local people over-enumerated this state recognition, it turns out, so that a large number of cults in the region claimed the official status of their local gods, but in reality never obtained it.[50]

Examples of the uniformity of elite and state actions in promoting the cults of deities include the transformation of the Guandi 關帝 [51] cult in the Qing period, analyzed by Prasenjit Duara. In his work Duara has argued that elites assisted the state in its endeavor to superscribe

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[48] On the "licentious cults" (also translated as excessive or profane cults), see Poo, *In Search of Personal Welfare*, pp. 185–192; Richard Von Glahn, *The Sinister Way: The Divine and the Demonic in Chinese Religious Culture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), pp. 158, 190, 200–201.

[49] Valerie Hansen, *Changing Gods in Medieval China, 1127–1276* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990); Chin. transl.: Han Sen 韩森, *Bian qian zhi shen: Nan Song shiqi de minjian xinyang* 变迁之神：南宋时期的民间信仰; Bao Weimin 包伟民, transl. (Hangzhou: Zhejiang renmin chubanshe, 1999).

[50] Hamashima Atsutoshi 濱島敦俊, *Ming Qing Jiangnan nongcun shehui yu minjian xinyang* 明清江南農村社會與民間信仰, Zhu Haibin 朱海滨, transl. (Xiamen: Xiamen daxue chubanshe, 2008), p. 35.

[51] Deified historical person Guan Yu 關羽 (160–219 C.E.).

the officially approved image of Guandi as a loyal hero onto an older one of a god of wealth.[52] Several scholars who studied the transformation of the cults of certain gods in late imperial period explicitly followed Watson's theory of standardization. For example, Guo Qitao has regarded the growth of the cult of exorcistic deities called the Five Furies (Wuchang 五猖) in the Huizhou 徽州 area (modern Anhui province) as part of the processes of "integration" and "gentrification" promoted by local elites.[53] Richard von Glahn has presented another case of standardization while analyzing the development of the cult of the Wutong 五通deities, who were worshipped as providers of illicit wealth (usually in exchange for sexual favors), into the mainstream cult of Wuxian 五顯, becoming gods of wealth in the Lower Yangtze region.[54]

However, other scholars have argued that such a view of standardization is too simplistic. For example, Katz has suggested that the collaboration on the part of officials and the elite was only one variant of conventional social interaction in the field of religious beliefs and practices. Katz has noted that the Watson's theory of standardization raised two major issues that still await to resolution by scholars: (1) how exactly certain religious practices were standardized, and (2) what group of actors was the main force behind this standardization. With regard to the first issue, on the basis of his own research on the local cults of Zhejiang province and also after summarizing the research of other scholars, Katz has persuasively argued that standardization of culture and religion in particular "involved not necessarily one single process but rather many processes promoted by a diverse range of groups that coexisted and interacted with each other."[55] As for the second issue, Katz has suggested that three forces had the dominant influence in the

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[52] Prasenjit Duara, *Culture, Power, and the State: Rural North China, 1900–1942* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1988), pp. 138–146.

[53] Qitao Guo, *Exorcism and Money: The Symbolic World of the Five-Fury Spirits in Late Imperial China* (Berkeley: Institute of East Asian Studies, 2003), p. 186.

[54] von Glahn, *The Sinister Way*, pp. 222–256.

[55] Paul R. Katz, "Orthopraxy and Heteropraxy Beyond the State: Standardizing Ritual in Chinese Society," *Modern China* 33, no. 1 (Jan. 2007), pp. 74–75.

so-called standardization: officials (state representatives), local elites,[56] and ritual specialists (most notably Daoists).[57]

Research by Western sinologists has demonstrated that elites often had their own interests, which differed from the state objective of cultural hegemony. Usually these were related to the control of local power. It is known, for example, that elites promoted cults to deities that were not officially approved. Robert Hymes has analyzed an example of this conflict in a book about the religious history of Mount Huagai 華蓋山 in Fuzhou 撫州 (Jiangxi province). During the Southern Song period an official unsuccessfully attempted to promote the cult of an immortal at Mount Ba 巴山over one at Mount Huagai devoted to the Three Perfected Lords (San zhenzun 三真尊), a cult patronized by members of the elite, including prominent Daoists.[58] Michael Szonyi has discussed another case of such state–elite opposition in Fuzhou 福州, Fujian province. There, local elites tried to mask the unapproved cult of the Five Emperors (Wudi 五帝) under the state-approved norms and thus maintained the distinctive cults of their community while creating an illusion of standardization.[59] Szonyi has defined this and similar practices as "pseudo-standardization" and "pseudo-orthopraxy."[60]

Katz also has demonstrated the important role of religious specialists in promoting cults of certain deities, for example, Marshal Wen.[61] Significantly, Daoists also used the term

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[56] Many scholars would identify them with the gentry (*shenshi* 紳士) layer of the traditional society, though one should be aware that representatives of other classes could be influential as well.

[57] Katz, "Orthopraxy and Heteropraxy," p. 78; Katz, "Xifang xuejie yanjiu," p. 65.

[58] Robert Hymes, *Way and Byway: Taoism, Local Religion, and Models of Divinity in Sung and Modern China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 114–146, Chin. transl.: Han Mingshi 韩明士 *Dao yu shu dao: Song dai yilai de daojiao, minjian xinyang he shenling moshi* 道与庶道：宋代以来的道教、民间信仰和神灵模式, Pi Qingsheng 皮庆生, transl. (Nanjing: Jiangsu renmin chubanshe, 2007).

[59] Michael Szonyi, "The Illusion of Standardizing the Gods: The Cult of the Five Emperors in Late Imperial China," *Journal of Asian Studies* 56, no. 1 (Feb. 1997): 113–135.

[60] Michael Szonyi, "Making Claims about Standardization and Orthopraxy in Late Imperial China: Rituals and Cults in the Fuzhou Region in Light of Watson's Theories," *Modern China* 33, no. 1 (Jan. 2007), pp. 63–64.

[61] Katz, *Demon Hordes*, pp. 76–116.

“licentious sacrifices” in application to the worship of morally deviant deities (usually the ghosts of the unruly dead or nature spirits) by spirit mediums (wu 巫師) who led rituals involving “bloody [i.e., meat] offerings” (xueshi 血食) for them.[62] However, if a deity’s cult adhered to the basic rules of a certain Daoist tradition, Daoists could incorporate it in their spiritual system.

Several scholars have openly criticized Watson’s theory of standardization. The special volume of the journal *Modern China* called “Ritual, Cultural Standardization, and Orthopraxy in China: Reconsidering James L. Watson’s Ideas” was devoted to this discussion.[63] While reconsidering Watson’s ideas and especially their application in later works, Donald S. Sutton has proposed the counter theory of “heteropraxy” (consistent failure to follow an avowed belief system on the part of believers) or “pseudo-standardization.” Local elites consciously maintained heteropraxy. In his analysis of differences in the funerary rites of several distinct regions of China, he argues that “what determined local patterns, as well as minor variations, was neither assertion by reforming leaders nor emulation of some China-wide orthodoxy, but new needs and engrained habits.” Besides, among the decisive factors were “immediate issues of individual sentiment and local advantage.”[64]

David Faure in his article in Chinese in his turn has criticized the views of the authors of the volume on reconsidering James L. Watson’s ideas, especially those proposed by Szonyi and Sutton. His main counter-argument concerns the definition of orthodoxy by the authors, who use the terms “pseudo-orthodoxy” or “heteropraxy.” First, we should remember that the notion of orthodoxy existed only in people’s minds, and it is very tricky for modern scholars to determine what this orthodoxy meant for people of a certain time and place in the past. Faure has argued against the over-simplistic interpretation of Watson’s theory of standardization as a linear one-directional process. Faure’s own view is close to that of Katz: several traditions and participants

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[62] Katz, “Orthopraxy and Heteropraxy,” p. 78; see also Terry F. Kleeman, "Licentious Cults and Bloody Victuals: Sacrifice, Reciprocity and Violence in Traditional China," *Asia Major*, Third Series, 7, no. 1 (1994): 185–211.

[63] Several articles quoted above were printed in this volume (33, no. 1).

[64] Donald S. Sutton, “Death Rites and Chinese Culture: Standardization and Variation in Ming and Qing Times,” *Modern China* 33, no. 1 (Jan. 2007), p. 146.

interacted in the process of standardization.[65] At the same time Faure has noted that it is not reasonable to differentiate rigidly between the three major participants in the process in Katz’s model. For example, it is well known that the Daoists often emulated state models in their ideology and rituals. These three groups were not as independent as it may seem to a modern person.

According to Faure, even if one takes the Neo-Confucian–inspired model of state control as the orthodoxy, this differed in time and place. Faure has explained the difference between the Zhejiang/Fujian and Southern Guangdong (Pearl River Delta) regions by the fact that state control took different forms in these areas: while in Zhejiang/Fujian it found its expression in the official recognition of local deities through granting titles, in Southern Guangdong standardization of the lineage rituals was the most important element.[66] Faure further has related this phenomenon to the difference in the cultural politics of the state during the Song dynasty, when Zhejiang and Fujian were brought under the state control, and during the Ming dynasty, when the Pearl River Delta actually became controlled by the state.[67] Different methods of state politics in the realm of popular beliefs and practices existed. Therefore, many questions concerning the processes of standardization and creation and transmission of orthodoxy in traditional China remain open and await further research.

B. Varying views of the Chinese pantheon

Another large topic related to the previous question of standardization concerns the interpretation of the Chinese pantheon and world outlook.[68] In the earlier period of the studies of Chinese

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[65] Faure and Liu Zhiwei, “‘Biaozhunhua’ haishi ‘zhengtonghua,’” pp. 12, 13–14.

[66] Faure’s research focuses on the history of lineages in the Pearl River Delta: David Faure, *Emperor and Ancestor: State and Lineage in South China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007); Chin. transl.: Ke Dawei 科大卫, *Huangdi he zuzong: Huanan de guojia yu zongzu* 皇帝和祖宗: 华南的国家与宗族, Bu Yongjian 卜永坚, transl. (Nanjing: Jiangsu renmin chubanshe, 2009).

[67] Faure and Liu Zhiwei, “‘Biaozhunhua’ haishi ‘zhengtonghua,’” pp. 17–19.

[68] See also Zhang Xun, “Bai hua qi fang,” pp. 7–11.

religions, many Western anthropologists adopted the sociological approach towards religion, namely the theories of Max Weber (1864–1920) and Émile Durkheim (1858–1917) about the connections of social structure and a system of religious beliefs. Here again one can see how much attention Western scholars have paid to the relations between beliefs and society in China.

Arthur Wolf, who studied the role of religious beliefs in modern Chinese society, proposed a theory according to which the system of religious beliefs was modeled on the bureaucratic system of the Chinese empire. According to Wolf, gods, ghosts, and ancestors have different statuses in "the supernatural bureaucracy."[69] Just as the social world is divided into the bureaucrats, kinsmen, and strangers, in the supernatural world there is a division between gods, ancestors, and ghosts. This difference finds its expression in the form of worship and manner of offerings. Gods correspond to officials; ancestors, to senior members of a line or lineage; and the dangerous and despised — but also worshipped — ghosts, to strangers. Another factor is that every person can simultaneously take the various social roles of kinsman, citizen, and stranger, which also corresponds to the structure of supernatural world: "At death the kinsman takes his place on the ancestral altar, where he continues to perform many of his rights and duties as an ascendant; the citizen is conducted to the underworld by a representative of the supernatural bureaucracy and is there judged and punished; while the stranger goes into the grave and becomes the source of an amoral and impersonal power."[70] Thus, Wolf's model also explains why the spirit of a dead person can take the double role of ancestor in one lineage and ghost in another.[71] The bureaucratic view of Chinese religion was aptly summarized in the term "imperial metaphor" that appears in the title of an influential book by Stephan Feuchtwang.[72]

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[69] Arthur P. Wolf, "Gods, Ghosts and Ancestors," in *Religion and Ritual in Chinese Society*, ed. Arthur P. Wolf (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1974): 131–182.

[70] Ibid., p.176.

[71] David K. Jordan also discussed this hierarchy in his *Gods, Ghosts, and Ancestors: Folk Religion in a Taiwanese Village*.

[72] Stephan Feuchtwang, *The Imperial Metaphor: Popular Religion in China* (London; New York: Routledge, 1992); Chin. transl. Wang Sifu 王斯福, *Diguo de yinyu: Zhongguo minjian zongjiao* 帝国的隐喻：中国民间宗教, Zhao Xudong 赵旭东, transl. (Nanjing: Jiangsu renmin chubanshe, 2008).

Many later scholars of Chinese religion, however, contested the theory of the "bureaucratic model." A special collection of essays dealing with "unruly gods" was published as a result.[73] These essays have demonstrated that in many cases state authorities did not recognize deities of a demonic nature, at least in their most widespread forms; yet their cults enjoyed great popularity in large groups of society. The cults of these deities often challenged the social hierarchy of the late imperial state. The editors of this collection, Meir Shahar and Robert P. Weller, have argued that "many deities are not conceived in simple bureaucratic terms and that the parallels between Chinese religion and politics are only partially revealing."[74] They did not completely reject the bureaucratic facet of Chinese religion, but they argued that it was not the only or dominating model of the supernatural. Summarizing the ideas of essays that deal with the cults of particular deities, the editors have concluded that "some of the most popular gods do not carry the trappings of office, and their power is not imagined in bureaucratic terms. They do not belong to a celestial bureaucracy. Their devotees address them in a personal language rather than in an administrative jargon. While the bureaucratic idea clearly dominates in the state religion, in the popular religion it is but one of several ways to think about the supernatural."[75] Numerous deities featured in the essays of that volume do not fit the bureaucratic model of the pantheon, and the few who still have bureaucratic celestial posts are usually ascribed with personalities, careers, and educational backgrounds that differ markedly from the appropriate backgrounds of officeholders in late imperial China. These unruly gods include spirits possessing questionable Confucian morality that have nevertheless risen to prominence and even rivaled properly bureaucratic gods: for example, Weller has presented situations concerning the cult of Ganwang (甘)王in east-central Guangxi province in the 1840s and the cult of "eighteen lords" (*shiba wanggong* 十八王公) in Taiwan in the 1980s in his essay in this volume.[76] These deities were

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[73] Meir Shahar and Robert P. Weller, eds., *Unruly Gods: Divinity and Society in China* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1996).

[74] Meir Shahar and Robert P. Weller, "Introduction: Gods and Society in China," in *Unruly Gods*, p. 8.

[75] Ibid., p. 8.

[76] Robert P. Weller, "Matricidal Magistrates and Gambling Gods: Weak States and Strong Spirits in China," in

known in both locations more for their immoral actions, such as sexual license, drunkenness, gambling, and murder, than for dedication to bureaucratic order. Weller also linked the rise of these illicit cults to the political, economical, and social peculiarities of corresponding regions. He has concluded that the rebellious facet of the pantheon has always existed side by side with its bureaucratic and orderly dimension. He notes, however, that this reversed aspect of the supernatural gains dominance in cases where the bureaucratic state loses control over religion.[77]

In another essay of this volume Meir Shahar has presented a useful classification of the non-bureaucratic deities based on the material of vernacular fiction. According to Shahar, there are three groups of gods that did not belong to the male-dominated literati elite of late imperial times: female (such as Bodhisattva Guanyin 觀音菩薩and Mazu), eccentric and rebellious (such as the drunken monk Jigong濟公and the mischievous monkey Sun Wukong 孫悟空), and martial (such as Zhenwu 真武and Guan Yu).[78]

Steven Sangren has taken another perspective on formulating the relations within the Chinese pantheon: he has argued that the danger for the bureaucratic order in Chinese religion often comes from the tensions in family relations. Sangren has analyzed three myths of non-bureaucratic deities: Nazha 哪吒, Guanyin (Miaoshan 妙善), and Mulian 目連. Their stories have been widespread in vernacular fiction, drama, and storytelling. Sangren has argued that these myths enjoyed great popularity because they expressed feelings and frustrations that were usually repressed in the normative state-approved self-representations of Chinese culture.[79] Prince Nazha was a rebellious son who attempted to kill his father. Princess Miaoshan (a reincarnation of Guanyin) refused her father’s order that she marry and thus violated the Confucian paradigm of family and social life. She was successful on the Buddhist path of

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Unruly Gods, 250–268.

[77] See also Robert P. Weller, *Resistance, Chaos, and Control in China: Taiping Rebels, Taiwanese Ghosts, and Tiananmen* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1994).

[78] Meir Shahar, “Vernacular Fiction in the Transmission of the Gods’ Cults in Late Imperial China” in *Unruly Gods:* 184–211; see also his *Crazy Ji: Chinese Religion and Popular Literature* (Cambridge: Harvard University Asia Center, 1998).

[79] Steven P. Sangren, “Myths, Gods, and Family Relations” in *Unruly Gods*, 150–183.

individual salvation and also reformulated the Confucian ideal of filial piety from this perspective.[80] Mulian violated the rules of the bureaucratic order of Underworld in his actions aimed at the salvation of the soul of his sinful mother.[81] Sangren’s essay also has raised the gender problematic, such as the question of the subversive power of women in Chinese religion that also often attracted attention of Western scholars (see section 5).

Other deities of a subversive nature or origin represented in this volume include the “immoral immortal” Lü Dongbin 呂洞賓; a female deity, Lady of Linshui (Linshui furen臨水夫人), whose cult is prevalent in Fujian and Taiwan; and the Infernal Generals (Bajiajiang 八家將) worshipped in Taiwan. It is also very important that the editors of the volume have pointed to the role of non-bureaucratic deities in millenarian movements and social outbreaks.[82] The authors of the essays in this volume also have paid attention to the forms of support for the subversive cults and the ways of their transmission. These problems are related to the discussion of standardization, creation, and transmission of orthodoxy, discussed in the previous section of this paper.

Later Western studies of Chinese religion further testified for the importance of the subversive cults in popular traditions. Poul Andersen wrote a monograph about the ancient cult of the water spirit Wuzhiqi 巫支祁in Xuyi盱眙county (in modern Jiangsu province).[83] While in South China the so-called illicit cults were often represented by plague-inflicting demons (also

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[80] There are special studies of the Miaoshan story in English: Glen Dudbridge, *The Legend of Miaoshan* (rev. ed.: Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2004); Chin. transl.: Du Deqiao 杜德橋, *Miaoshan chuanshuo: Guanyin pusa yuanqi kao* 妙善傳說 : 觀音菩薩緣起考, Li Wenbin 李文彬 et al., transl. (Taibei: Juliu tushu, 1990); *Personal Salvation and Filial Piety: Two Precious Scroll Narratives of Guanyin and Her Acolytes*, translated and with an introduction by Wilt L. Idema (Honolulu : University of Hawai’i Press, 2008), pp. 1–43.

[81] On the Mulian story and related rituals, see Teiser, *The Ghost Festival*; Alan Cole, *Mothers and Sons in Chinese Buddhism* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998); Qitao Guo, *Ritual Opera and Mercantile Lineage: The Confucian Transformation of Popular Culture in Late Imperial Huizhou* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005).

[82] Shahar and Weller, “Introduction: Gods and Society in China,” in *Unruly Gods*, p. 18.

[83] Poul Andersen, *The Demon Chained under Turtle Mountain: The History and Mythology of the Chinese River Spirit Wuzhiqi* (Berlin: G+H, 2001).

translated as “furies”), in North China there was another peculiar category of subversive gods — fox spirits. There are two English monographs about the worship of the fox in North China.[84] Foxes were well known for their immoral actions; however, they also attracted enormous attention from the literati and were often portrayed in literati works of late imperial times. Significantly, Kang Xiaofei in her analysis of literati records discovered that their authors often drew parallels between the Wutong deities of the South and the foxes of the North.[85] In their studies, therefore, Western scholars recreated a broad picture of the complex pantheon of Chinese religion.

4. Subjects in Western studies of Chinese popular religion

For quite a long time scholars of Chinese religion have tried to avoid employing the broad category of “popular religion” and instead have preferred detailed analysis of such smaller units as family religion, morality, cosmology, and spirit-possession. Stephen F. Teiser noted this tendency in the mid-1990s.[86] As we have seen in sections 3 and 4 of this paper, the major theoretical discussions in Western scholarship on Chinese religion involved such subjects as gods and their cults, religion and the family, cosmology, and rites of passage. These subjects became traditional in this field. In this section I would like to discuss other subjects and aspects of popular religion that Western scholars have explored at length. In the research on several of these subjects Western scholars were pioneers and continue to make important contributions now.

For example, one must credit Western scholars with the early discovery and scholarly analysis of the diversity of forms of popular beliefs and practices in China. To turn only to the subject of mantic practices, we observe that a variety of methods and materials for divination since early times were explored in Western studies. One can classify divinations by material:

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[84] Xiaofei Kang, *The Cult of the Fox: Power, Gender, and Popular Religion in Late Imperial and Modern China* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006); Rania Huntington, *Alien Kind: Foxes and Late Imperial Chinese Narrative* (Cambridge: Harvard University Asia Center, 2003).

[85] Kang, *The Cult of the Fox*, pp. 37–39.

[86] Teiser, “Popular religion,” p. 378. The same approach appears in Clart, “Chinese Popular Religion.”

tortoise shells, scapulae, yarrow stalks, facial structure, movements in the heavens, earth formations, the manipulations of the broken and unbroken lines in the hexagrams of the Yijing (易經, *The Book of Changes*), and words (including those transmitted by mediums). Western scholars thoroughly researched the technique usually referred to as "geomancy" (*fengshui* 風水, literally "wind and water"; *dili xue* 地理學, "study of the principles of the earth"; or *kanyu* 堪輿, "canopy and chariot" in traditional sources).[87] There are also works on the later use of Yijing and fortune-telling.[88] Other methods of divination that have received attention in Western studies include oneiromancy,[89] sortilege,[90] and planchette.[91] The last technique implies the activities of mediums who may be possessed by the deities or spirits at various degrees — from conscious to unconscious states — and has been widely used for different purposes in sectarian temples, more mainstream "phoenix halls" (luantang 鸞堂) often patronized by the local elites, and Daoist

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[87] Stephan Feuchtwang, *An Anthropological Analysis of Chinese Geomancy* (Vientiane, Laos: Vithagna, 1974); Maurice Freedman, "Geomancy" in *The Study of Chinese Society: Essays*, selected and introduced by G. William Skinner (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1979), 313–333; Andrew March, "An Appreciation of Chinese Geomancy," *Journal of Asian Studies* 27. 2 (1968): 253–267; Derek Walters, *Chinese Geomancy: Dr. J. J. M. de Groot's Seminal Study of Feng shui, Together with Detailed Commentaries by the Western World's Leading Authority on the Subject* (Shaftesbury, Dorset: Element Books, 1989).

[88] Kidder Smith, Jr., et al., ed., *Sung Dynasty Uses of the I ching* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990); Richard J. Smith, *Fortune-tellers and Philosophers: Divination in Traditional Chinese Society* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1991).

[89] Carolyn T. Brown, ed. *Psycho-Sinology: The Universe of Dreams in Chinese Culture* (Washington, D.C.: Asia Program, Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, 1988); Roberto K. Ong, *The Interpretation of Dreams in Ancient China* (Munich: Bochum, 1985); Romeyn Taylor, "Ming T'ai-tsu's Story of a Dream," *Monumenta Serica* 32 (1976): 1–20.

[90] Wolfram Eberhard, "Orakles und Theater in China," in Wolfram Eberhard, *Studies in Chinese Folklore and Related Essays*, Alide Eberhard, transl. (Bloomington: Indiana University Research Center for the Language Sciences, 1970): 191–199; Strickmann, *Chinese Magical Medicine*.

[91] Seaman, *Temple Organization in a Chinese Village*; Jordan and Overmyer, *The Flying Phoenix*; Philip Clart, "The Phoenix and the Mother: The Interaction of Spirit Writing Cults and Popular Sects in Taiwan," *Journal of Chinese Religions* 25 (1997): 1–32.

temples since the middle of the nineteenth century at the latest. Planchette divinations were closely related to prophecies and to the compilation of “morality books” (shanshu 善書, see below).

An intriguing area of the field is the study of gender problematic in Chinese religion. For a long time Western scholars had noticed that the forms of worship by men and women differed in China. Scholars have argued that the reasons for this are peculiarities of the social status of women in Chinese society: the potentially destructive power of women is related to their inferior status in the family. This status of women is seen as equal to that of “strangers” in the traditional Chinese cosmology (see section 4). For example, Margery Wolf has analyzed the structure of a typical family in the following way. In many regions of China women had to move into their husband’s homes after marriage. However, the husband’s lineage (patriline) never accepted them as fully entitled members. A woman could find her salvation in the “uterine” family composed of herself and her children, especially sons.[92] This creates psychological tension in a family that is also reflected in the religious life of people.

A number of female cults emerged in the late imperial period. There are Western works on the female cults in China and forms of female religiosity related to their specific role in the traditional society.[93] Self-representation of female cults often challenged the traditional hierarchy of values. Basing his work on a theory of Margery Wolf, Sangren has argued that female cults reflect the ambiguity of the social status of women in the family lineage. From the point of view of the lineage, a woman can take a double role: the unifying role of mother/sister and the divisive role of wife/daughter-in-law. Women simultaneously constitute a means for continuation of domestic groups and a threat to their solidarity. Believers think of many female deities in their “mother” status, while their divisive role is not directly expressed in sacred symbols. According

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[92] Margery Wolf, *Women and the Family in Rural Taiwan* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1972).

[93] Steven P. Sangren, “Female Gender in Chinese Religious Symbols: Kuan Yin, Ma Tsu and the “Eternal Mother” *Signs* 9 (1983): 4–25; Chün-fang Yü, *Kuan-yin: the Chinese Transformation of Avalokiteśvara* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), Chin. version: Yu Junfang 于君方, *Guanyin: Pusa Zhongguohua de yanbian* 觀音: 菩薩中國化的演變 (Taibei: Fagu wenhua, 2009); Brigitte Baptandier, *The Lady of Linshui: A Chinese Female Cult*, Kristin Ingrid Fryklund, transl. (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2008).

to Sangren, “while the connection between mothers as unifying forces and female deities is explicitly recognized and positively valued, women’s divisive potential as wives is implicitly denied normative legitimacy and given only an indirect (if not unconscious) religious expression in pollution beliefs.”[94] The second important conclusion of Sangren is his interpretation of female cults as “important (and perhaps even necessary) counterparts to the hierarchical, bureaucratic orthodoxies of state religion, territorial cults and ancestor worship.[95] This second thesis is related to the broader discussion of the relations between society and cosmology in China (see part 4).

A number of Western works analyzed women’s engagement in the specific forms of popular Buddhism and sects. In connection with the Buddhist interpretations of the female nature as inherently sinful and ritually impure, special rituals aimed at the purification and ultimate salvation of women developed in the traditional society.[96] There were various responses on the part of the male literati towards women’s engagement in religious activities in late imperial times.[97]

Recently Western scholars also have started to reevaluate the male gender aspect of Chinese religiosity. One can regard the rituals of secret societies and the worship of deified outlaws (see section 4) as particular forms of male religiosity that also challenge the norms of state and lineage. The forms of male religiosity in relation to the social and family tensions

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[94] Sangren, “Female Gender in Chinese Religious Symbols,” p. 24.

[95] Ibid., 25.

[96] Beata Grant, “The Spiritual Saga of Woman Huang: From Pollution to Purification” in *Ritual Opera, Operatic Ritual*: 224–311; Daniel L. Overmyer, “Values in Chinese Sectarian Literature: Ming and Ch’ing Pao-chüan” in *Popular Culture in Late Imperial China:* 219–254; Cole, *Mothers and Sons in Chinese Buddhism*; Neky Tak-ching Cheung, *Women’s Ritual in China: Jiezhu (receiving Buddhist prayer beads) Performed by Menopausal Women in Ninghua, Western Fujian* (Lewiston, N.Y.: Edwin Mellen Press, 2008); *Escape from Blood Pond Hell: The Tales of Mulian and Woman Huang*; translated and introduced by Beata Grant and Wilt L. Idema (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2011).

[97] Zhou Yiqun, “The Hearth and the Temple: Mapping Female Religiosity in Late Imperial China,” *Late Imperial China*, vol. 24, no. 2 (Dec. 2003): 109–155.

became the subject of a book by Avron Boretz.[98] Boretz explores the social background of ritual violence in several locations in China. He interprets this martial ritual practice as a counterpart of the civil power in lineages and also as an expression of suppressed desire for independence on the part of young men. Significantly, ritual actors who are presented in the book are members of sworn brotherhoods and gangs. They are outcasts of society who do not have stable places in the usual family hierarchy.

For a long time multi-language studies of Chinese popular religion have taken mainly rural areas inhabited by the Han nationality as their objects. However, Western scholars also have made a considerable contribution to the study of religious traditions in cities and towns. As Katz has fairly noted, sinologists for long did not pay enough attention the religious traditions of cities.[99] At the same time, Western scholars early initiated ethnographic descriptions of large city temples and their activities.[100] During a period of extensive anthropological studies of Chinese religion, detailed studies of temple and cult associations in the cities appeared.[101] These studies emphasized the role of temples in the organization of social life: local elites sponsored the cults in return for prestige and authority in the locality.

Since 2000 Western scholars of Chinese religion have published several studies that analyzed the role of religious associations in Chinese cities. In her study of temple life in Peking

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[98] *Gods, Ghosts, and Gangsters: Ritual Violence, Martial Arts, and Masculinity on the Margins of Chinese Society* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2011).

[99] Katz, "Xifang xuejie yanjiu," p. 58.

[100] Anne Swann Goodrich, *The Peking Temple of the Eastern Peak: The Tung-yüeh miao in Peking and Its Lore, with 20 Plates* (Nagoya: Monumenta Serica, 1964); Anne Swann Goodrich, *Chinese Hells: The Peking Temple of Eighteen Hells and Chinese Conceptions of Hell* (St. Augustin: Monumenta Serica, 1981).

[101] See, for example, Stephan Feuchtwang, "City Temples in Taipei Under Three Regimes" in *The Chinese City Between Two Worlds*, ed. Mark Elvin and G. William Skinner (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1974), 263–302; Kristofer M. Schipper, "Neighborhood Cult Associations in Traditional Tainan" in *The City in Late Imperial China*, ed. G. William Skinner (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1977), 651–678; Chin. transl.: Shi Jianya 施坚雅, ed., Zhonghua diguo wanqi de chengshi 中华帝国晚期的城市, Ye Guangting 叶光庭 et al., transl. (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2000). See also Donald R. DeGlopper, *Lukang, Commerce and Community in a Chinese City* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995).

(Beijing) during the Ming and Qing dynasties, Naquin has demonstrated the multifunctionality of religious establishments in a city: they were used for fairs, markets, charity, tourism, politics, and leisured sociability; therefore, they had a decisive impact on public city life.[102] Especially important was the religious establishments' role in providing space for social activities for gatherings of diverse groups. Naquin has analyzed various forms of religious establishments and the roles taken by various strata of the urban population in religious activities. The comparative analysis extends over the line of the Ming-Qing transition in 1644. Naquin also has used rare sources, namely commemorative inscriptions, in recreating the history of religious life. Richard Belsky has further explored the religious aspect of *huiguan* (會館, native place lodges) noted by Naquin.[103] There are also Western works on the special features of various religious traditions in the urban environment.[104] They explore such issues as the revival of religious traditions in urban centers during the Republican period, the transformation of these traditions in relation to the formation of Chinese "modernity," the interaction of lay believers and clergy in religious activities, and the broad social influence of religious associations, such as their educational and philanthropic undertakings.

Quite a rare topic in the studies of popular religion is the role of cults and religious practices in legal culture. This subject was explored in the recent book by Paul R. Katz, in which he analyzed a number of the so-called judicial rituals: oaths (often in the form of chicken-

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[102] Susan Naquin, *Peking: Temples and City Life, 1400–1900* (Berkeley; London: University of California Press, 2000).

[103] Richard Belsky, *Localities at the Center: Native Place, Space, and Power in Late Imperial Beijing* (Cambridge: Harvard University Asia Center, 2005), pp. 137–138.

[104] See, for example, Vincent Goossaert, *The Taoists of Peking, 1800–1949: A Social History of Urban Clerics* (Cambridge: Harvard University Asia Center, 2007); Xun Liu, *Daoist Modern: Innovation, Lay Practice, and the Community of Inner Alchemy in Republican Shanghai* (Cambridge: Harvard University Asia Center, 2009); Paul R. Katz (Kang Bao 康豹), "Yi ge zhuming Shanghai shangren yu cishanjia de zongjiao shenghuo – Wang Yiting" 一個著名上海商人與慈善家的宗教生活——王一亭 (A life of a famous Shanghai businessman and philanthropist Wang Yiting) in *Cong chengshi kan Zhongguo de xiandaixiang* 從城市看中國的現代性 (Looking at Chinese modernity from the point of view of the city), ed. Wu Renshu 巫仁恕、Lin Meili 林美莉、Katz (Kang Bao) (Nankang: Zhongyang yanjiuyuan jindaishi yanjiusuo, 2010), 275–296.

beheadings), rituals of penitence and self-mortification, and underworld indictments.[105]

As noted in sections four and five, Western scholars of Chinese religion paid special attention to the forms and methods of the transmission of religious beliefs and practices in traditional China. We already have noted the abundance of Western works on ritual, so-called "rites of passage," that are usually defined as the institutionalized practices surrounding the transition from one social category to the next. Two other major forms of organization of religious life in Chinese society, festivals and pilgrimages, always have been important subjects in Western works. Special studies of Chinese festivals in English became classics in this area of research. Among those are studies that provide a comprehensive schedule of the festival year[106] and those that examine a special festival: New Year,[107] the Dragon Boat Festival,[108] the Ghost Festival,[109] and the Plague Festival.[110] Western scholars also have paid considerable attention to the temple festivals and their role in local communities, especially in rural regions. There are case studies of particular temple festivals, and general works concentrating on the history and revival of these events in China.[111]

With regard to the pilgrimages, a special volume edited by Naquin and Chun-fang Yu

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[105] *Divine Justice: Religion and the Development of Chinese Legal Culture* (London; New York: Routledge, 2009).

[106] Wolfram Eberhard, *Chinese Festivals* (New York: H. Schuman, 1952); Laurence G. Thompson, *Chinese Religion: An Introduction* (Fourth ed., Belmont: Wadsworth Publishing, 1989).

[107] Derk Bodde, *Festivals in Classical China: New Year and Other Annual Observances During the Han Dynasty, 206 B.C.-A.D. 220* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975).

[108] Göran Aijmer, *The Dragon Boat Festival on the Hupeh-Hunan Plain, Central China: a Study in the Ceremonialism of the Transplantation of Rice* (Stockholm: Ethnographical Museum of Sweden, 1964).

[109] Teiser, *The Ghost Festival*; Robert P. Weller, *Unities and Diversities in Chinese Religion*.

[110] Katz, *Demon Hordes*, pp. 141–172.

[111] James Flath, "Temple Fairs and the Republican State in North China," *Twentieth-Century China* 30, no. 1 (2004): 39–63; David Johnson, "Temple Festivals in Southeastern Shanxi: The Sai of Nan-shê village and Big West Gate" *Minsu quyi* 民俗曲藝 91 (1994): 641–734; Adam Yuet Chau, *Miraculous Response: Doing Popular Religion in Contemporary China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006).

contains several related case studies of these.[112] The essays in this volume explore the formation and functioning of the most important pilgrimage centers from the perspectives of anthropology, art, history, literature, and politics. The essays mostly deal with the pilgrimages to sacred mountains; for example, Glen Dudbridge has discussed female pilgrimages to Mount Tai (Taishan 泰山), John Lagerwey to the centers of Mountain Wudang (Wudangshan 武當山), Naquin to the religious centers and associations of Mountain Miaofeng (Miaofengshan 妙峰山) in the vicinity of Beijing, and Yu the history of Putuo Island (Putuoshan 普陀山), a sacred site of the cult of Guanyin.[113] Brian R. Dott undertook a deep analysis of the late imperial period pilgrimages to Mount Tai.[114] In his book he has proceeded from the fact that various social groups of pilgrims went there and describes how their varying interactions with the sacred site were related to their identities. Thus Dott has analyzed the social landscape of Mount Tai and examined the motives of prosperous male literati as well as those of women and illiterate pilgrims, using the evidence from fiction, poetry, travel literature, and official records as well as his fieldwork.

The attention of Western scholars of Chinese religion was primarily attracted to the textual transmission, especially literature in the vernacular, which was the means of the transmission of religious beliefs and practices. The most common sources to be used by Western scholars are popular scriptures dealing with the hagiographies of deities.[115] I have noted above the studies of a particular sectarian literature called “precious scrolls” by Overmyer (see section 2). Another category of popular religious literature, “morality books,” was the subject of special

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[112] *Pilgrims and Sacred Sites in China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992).

[113] Glen Dudbridge, “A Pilgrimage in Seventeenth-century Fiction: T’ai-shan and the *Hsing-shih yin-yüan chuan*,” *T’oung Pao* 77 (1991, 4–5): 226–252.

[114] *Identity Reflections: Pilgrimages to Mount Tai in Late Imperial China* (Cambridge: the Harvard University Asia Center, 2004).

[115] See, for example, Terry F. Kleeman, *A God’s Own Tale: The Book of Transformations of Wenchang, the Divine Lord of Zitong* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994); Katz, *Demon Hordes*, pp. 76–116; Dean, *Taoist Ritual*; Robert L. Chard, “Rituals and Scriptures of the Stove Cult” in David G. Johnson, ed., *Ritual and Scripture in Chinese Popular Religion: Five Studies* (Berkeley: California U.P., 1995): 3–54.

studies in Western languages before the related studies of Chinese scholars appeared.[116] Especially noteworthy is the case of the use of a popular form of "morality book" by a Buddhist monk, Yunqi Zhuhong雲棲袾宏 (1535–1615), studied by Chun-fang Yu.[117]

There are also Western studies of other written sources on popular cults, such as "transformation texts" (bianwen 變文), texts of the Tang and Five Dynasties (907–960) periods discovered in Dunhuang in 1900, which have primarily Buddhist connotations but also narrate popular indigenous stories;[118] and later folklore.[119] Western scholars of Chinese religion also have analyzed the roles of other literary forms, such as the vernacular novel, in the processes of creation and transmission of the cults of the deities. Several studies mentioned above extensively use literary material.[120] Western scholars have translated and analyzed a number of novels that have important religious meaning.[121]

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[116] Cynthia Brokaw, *The Ledgers of Merit and Demerit: Social Change and Moral Order in Late Imperial China* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991); Catherine Bell, "Printing and Religion in China: Some Evidence from the Taishang Ganying Pian," *Journal of Chinese Religions* 20 (Fall 1992): 173–186; Catherine Bell, "'A Precious Raft to Save the World': The Interaction of Scriptural Traditions and Printing in a Chinese Morality Book," *Late Imperial China* 17 (1996. 1): 158–200.

[117] *The Renewal of Buddhism in China: Chu-Hung and the Late Ming Synthesis* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1981), pp. 101–138.

[118] David Johnson, "The Wu Tzu-hsu *Pien-wen* and Its Sources," parts 1–2, *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 40, no.1 (June 1980): 93–156; 40, no. 2 (Dec. 1980): 465–505; Victor H. Mair, *T'ang Transformation Texts: A Study of the Buddhist Contribution to the Rise of Vernacular Fiction and Drama in China* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989), Chin. transl.: Mei Weiheng 梅维桓, *Tang dai bianwen: fojiao dui Zhongguo baihua xiaoshuo ji xiqu chansheng de gongxian zhi yanjiu* 唐代变文: 佛教对中国白话小说及戏曲产生的贡献之研究; Yang Jidong 杨继东, Chen Yinchi 陈引驰, transl. (Shanghai: Zhongxi shuju, 2011).

[119] Robert L. Chard, "Folktales on the God of the Stove" *Chinese Studies* 8 (1990): 149–182.

[120] Dudbridge, *The Legend of Miaoshan*; Shahar, "Vernacular Fiction in the Transmission of the Gods' Cults"; Shahar, *Crazy Ji*; Glen Dudbridge, "Yu-ch'ih Chiung at An-yang: an Eighth-Century Cult and Its Myths," *Asia Major* 3rd ser. 3, no. 1 (1990): 27–49.

[121] Glen Dudbridge, *The Hsi-yu chi: A Study of Antecedents to the Sixteenth-Century Chinese Novel* (Cambridge [Eng.]: Cambridge University Press, 1970); Gary Seaman, *Journey to the North: An Ethnohistorical Analysis and*

The media of popular religion analyzed in Western works, however, have not been limited to literary sources. Several Western studies have discussed the relations between popular cults and art, namely temple architecture and murals. A number of scholars have used the method of combining the study of written sources with analysis of art objects.[122] Several scholars also approach popular cults from the perspective of the performative arts, especially folk theater.[123] The study of ritual music in the context of popular religion is also a growing field in the West.[124]

Conclusion

Concluding this very brief survey, I would like to note that Western scholarship on Chinese popular religion since early times up to the present moment has been diverse and innovative in terms of approaches, subjects, and views. However, it appears that the major concern of many Western scholars was the social role of Chinese religion. They have demonstrated that a religious element (the element concerning the supernatural powers) was important in the history of Chinese society and state. One can approach this aspect of religion from different angles.

Western scholars have made important contributions to the theoretical basis of the studies, and they also have introduced new research methods and collected a considerable amount of

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Annotated Translation of the Chinese Folk Novel Pei-yu chi (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987). Mark Meulenbeld is now working on a book about the novel *Enfeoffment of Gods* (Fengshen yanyi 封神演義).

[122] Paul R. Katz, *Images of the Immortal: The Cult of Lü Dongbing at the Palace of Eternal Joy* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1999); Anning Jing, *Water God’s Temple of the Guangsheng Monastery: Cosmic Function of Art, Ritual and Theatre* (Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2002); Tracy Miller, *The Divine Nature of Power: Chinese Ritual Architecture at the Sacred Site of Jinci* (Cambridge: Harvard University Asia Center, 2007).

[123] See, for example, David Johnson, *Spectacle and Sacrifice: The Ritual Foundations of Village Life in North China* (Cambridge: Harvard University Asia Center, 2009); David Holm, “The Death of Tiaoxi (the Leaping Play): Ritual Theatre in the Northwest of China,” *Modern Asian Studies* 37, no. 4 (Oct. 2003): 863–884.

[124] Bell Yung, Evelyn S. Rawski, and Rubie S. Watson, eds., *Harmony and Counterpoint: Ritual Music in Chinese Context* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996); Stephen Jones, *Plucking the Winds: Lives of Village Musicians in Old and New China* (Leiden: CHIME foundation, 2004); Stephen Jones, *Ritual and Music of North China: Shawm Bands in Shanxi* (vol. 1, Aldershot, Eng.; Burlington, Vt.: Ashgate, 2007); Stephen Jones, *Ritual and Music of North China: Shaanbei* (vol. 2, Aldershot Eng.; Burlington, Vt.: Ashgate, 2009).

valuable information on Chinese religion. Initially they applied a number of Western concepts to Chinese religions, but many of these concepts have been reevaluated from the perspective of the Chinese situation as research has continued. Western scholarship has played an important role in the formation of the field of the study of Chinese religion, paralleled by the development of Chinese and Japanese studies. Its influence has constituted an important impetus for numerous studies in East Asian languages: Chinese and Japanese scholars often cite Western works and debate with their authors. Western scholars often present an "outsider's" view on the Chinese situation, and they often bring up issues that indigenous scholars would overlook or underestimate. We can conclude that Western scholarship can inspire further study in various directions, and that the study of Western research works remains important for East Asian scholars of Chinese religion. Western scholarship on Chinese popular religion had important achievements in the past, and it remains a strong and growing field. Major theoretical questions remain open and await answers in the future.

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